

KEYNOTE

FOR Filipino-American Community of Southern Colorado (FACSC)

2025 Miss Fil-Am Coronation

[10 pause – warm eye sweep L-C-R]

Good evening.

Next time, I'll moonwalk my way up here.

[half-smile, small head tilt]

“But trust me... you don't want to see that yet.

[beat – lean back, small grin]

As your know, my wife Emily is the better dancer anyway.”

[shrug – gesture open palm toward heart → audience laugh space]

“Looking at you all...

I can already feel the energy in this room.”

[beat 4–5 sec]

[lower voice, lean in, hands on ear]

“...and maybe even a little CHISMIS here and there.”

[😊 (MEDIUM) → LAUGHTER PAUSE ~6–7 sec]

“...seeing FRIENDLY faces...

reminds me climbing—

Or, more accurately, CRAWLING—

up the Manitou Incline with my Army kababayans...

...and they know who they are.”

[PAUSE – let laugh roll]

“And let me tell you...

I was set up, being the only Air Force guy.

And no... they are NOT going to convince me

to do that crawl again.”

[PAUSE – light chuckle space]

“Because if I did...

they’d be waiting two hours at the top...

standing, smiling, and tapping their smart watches.”

[PAUSE – smile, let laugh hit]

Saying, “Talaga, Sir?!

Followed by “Grabe ka!, Sir?!

“Next time—I’ll just fly...

and then gently

float down with my parachute...

because I’m not sharing.”

[PAUSE – exit on laugh]

“Otherwise... I’ll just roll down—

Practice my moonwalking when

making my way back to the car...

And then I'll be

standing,

smiling, and

tapping my watch

when the kababayans finally arrive.”

[SOFTER TONE – playful → serious shift]

“Kidding aside...

actually...

the Army kababayans

did NOT leave a fellow veteran behind.”

[PAUSE – 1 sec – small smile fades into reflective tone]

[STEADY VOICE – slight hand lift, palm open]

“...what lifts us higher...

isn't Air Force flying”

[PAUSE – half beat – hand gesture upward, flap lightly once]

“...and Army floating down alone.”

“It's the

Friendship,

Unity and the

Bayanihan spirit

we all share here...”

And that's the spirit I want to talk about today.

[REFLECTIVE PAUSE of 8-10s – soft smile, nod left → center → right, hold silence as if blessing them and receiving blessing in return, get there together]

Before I say thank you,

Imagine for a moment...

the Filipino American Community of Southern Colorado did not exist.

No pageants.

No parades.

No potlucks.

No place to

pass on

language or legacy.

[PAUSE]

I think about that when...

- **Parents help their little girl adjust her tiara, crown or sash [or]**
- **A well-respected lolo reminds a child to say po and opo [or]**
- **when friends gather around sharing the unforgettable aromas of warm trays of adobo**

And other Filipino favorites.

[PAUSE]

These aren't just small moments.

They are sacred rituals of leadership in motion:

[BEAT, LOOK UP, 2 SEC]

That is,

Friendship — made visible.

Unity — passed on — you can taste.

[PAUSE]

And thank God this community DOES exists —

because no potlucks means no baon...

which means

some of us might have to MAGLUTO from scratch.

[PAUSE]

And that's just not safe...

especially when my cooking is still —

let's just say — a work in progress.”

[pause]

NOW, Thank you, [Maddie],

for the warm introduction...

and thank you [impromptu call out]

— all of you —

for letting me be part of this coronation.

[shift tone warmer – nod across audience]

I'm just grateful to be standing here with all of you tonight.”

Any recognition I've received

is again a sign of the Bayanihan spirit

we share.

As mentioned earlier

I'm John Santiago — retired military,

amateur comedian,

mostly engineer... so I don't expect any punchlines to work.

[BEAT]

But let's give it a SHOT.

“And if my Air Force humor is already shot...

[PAUSE – 1 sec, grin, shrug]

well, it just simply won't...land WELL.”

[At least my brother in LA laughed politely.]

I'm also a longtime member and volunteer of IEEE —

the largest community of engineers and technologists,

with about half a million members worldwide.

For those unfamiliar, IEEE stands for the ...

Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

[SOFT, BEAT OR PAUSE]

But what matters most to me,

Is using those skills

To give back to the community

Just like all of you.

[PAUSE]

While IEEE advances technology for humanity,

**I see the Filipino American Community of Southern Colorado as
advancing**

culture,

identity, and

opportunity.

Cultural spaces like this aren't luxuries —

they're a must, like oxygen.

Here's why?

During the COVID lockdown,

a 2022 study from the Urban Institute found:

1 in 4 Asian American youth

have been told

they don't belong here.

But when they have a cultural home

like this community,

they feel

rooted,

seen, and

proud.

Since 1993, founded by Mr. Ron Nono, a fellow veteran and leader,

this community has built several annual pageants, like Miss Fil-Am and cultural celebrations,

forged civic partnerships,

offered relief during Typhoon disasters.

provided hundreds of scholarships to local high school seniors...

and congratulations to all the young people here tonight...

...your active involvement will continue to create

lasting memories through traditions like

Flores de Mayo,

Independence Day,

and holiday gatherings.”

And don't forget the opportunities to march with

fellow brothers and sisters in arms during Veterans Day

— where we didn't just see uniforms and flags,

but veterans,

families,

and the community walking together

in step,

honoring those who served

and inspiring those yet to serve.”

[BEAT - REFLECTIVE]

That’s unity in motion and...

Legacy being lived out.

[PAUSE]

Most important, this community mentored youth

performing folk dances

from Pueblo to the Air Force Academy,

encouraging them to attend

national leadership summits.

[PAUSE]

Finally, you've sparked something powerful,

upward mobility.

Pew Research shows:

Filipino Americans with strong community ties

are three times more likely to pursue

higher education.

[BEAT]

That's not just tradition

— that's transformation.

I can imagine many students saying, "This community gave me the confidence to apply to

CU Boulder,

UCCS, or others

Or pursue my dream career."

[PAUSE]

And it all starts with values.

[SOFT]

First comes Friendship —

a foundational block in John Wooden’s Pyramid of Success,

my leadership compass and

The most valuable leadership framework since graduating from UCLA.

[PAUSE]

“Wooden — a former civil engineering student,

a Navy veteran from WWII,

and later both a Hall-of-Fame

college Basketball player and coach —

taught me

that Friendship isn't about popularity..." —

it's about mutual respect,

genuine care, and

loyalty, .

Several years later

after completing a 9-month leadership program

at the Air Command and Staff College,

I wrote to him, thanking him and sharing how I used

his Pyramid as a leadership tool in the Air Force.

To my surprise, he wrote back — on his 84th birthday

— thanking me.

In the letter, dated Oct 14, 1994

It reads:

‘There is no greater joy than knowing something you’ve said or done has helped another...

especially with no thought of return. Thank You!’

Sincerely,

John Wooden

That’s not just basketball.

That’s bayanihan — lifting others, with no expectation.

And not long after, Coach Wooden shared more of that bayanihan -

That team spirit of ‘WE supercedes ME’ .

with the world through his leadership books, carrying that message to millions.

That's the power of mentorship.

We lift each other building leaders that last.”

[BEAT – small nod]

I even laminated his letter —

and it still hangs on my wall today,

reminding me that when you lift others,

you build leaders that matter.

[STEADY TONE – new pivot]

So here's what I've learned — success isn't just about

what you know...

it's about who you lift.

[Pause – lean in, drop voice slightly]

In fact... it's really this simple:

Skillset × Mindset = Success

[Gesture writing it in the air – 2 seconds]

- **Skillset** → the “High Tech” skills we build as engineers, leaders, and creators.
- **Mindset** → the “High Touch” humanity we bring through care, respect, and loyalty.

[Short beat – small nod]

And when you multiply them...

- **High Tech × High Touch = Higher Purpose**

[Energizing lift – look across the audience]

**That’s when success isn’t just from our eyes —
it’s success from the Maker’s eyes.**

Otherwise, it’s empty when technology is without humanity

We see friendship developing leaders when:

- **A tita making lumpia while other titas guide youth rehearsing tinikling**

- **A loving tito giving quiet and gentle pep talks backstage**
- **A nervous student finding their voice during rehearsal**

[PAUSE]

And don't underestimate the ripple effect,

Filipino-American teens face higher stress

and cultural conflict than other Asian youth.

[LOOK UP - 3 SECONDS]

But when surrounded by

supportive titas, titos, and peers,

their cultural mindset improves leading to :

- **Pride in their heritage**
- **Clarity in their identity**
- **Strength to navigate between American and Filipino cultures**

[PAUSE]

That's what your friendship provides — a foundation of belonging with a higher purpose.

[PAUSE]

Once the foundation is built,

Within the word community lies your next value:

UNITY

**The civic beam of light that binds
our country —
this community...together.**

[BEAT]

13 colonies.

One nation.

That didn't happen by accident.

[PAUSE]

Unity requires coordination across diverse

backgrounds —

That's what this community does:

bridging:

Ilocanos,

Tagalogs,

Visayans,

first-gens,

second-gens,

veterans,

and Dreamers.

[BEAT]

This is cultural harmony by design.

[PAUSE]

In engineering, we call it synchronization.

In the military, we call it unity of effort.

In the Filipino culture, you got it...we call it bayanihan.

[PAUSE]

“When unity and friendship come together,

community involvement turns into a lasting legacy.”

From my techie view,

- **Friendship is the current — it powers the flow**

trust,

helping hands, and

smiles

Friendship builds trust.

Without trust,

nothing lasts.

- **Unity is the bridge — the backbone of strength, direction, and stability — holding our diversity under one roof.”**

- **Culture is the signal...it’s what we SEND**

from one generation to the next

A language,

A story,

A recipe, or

A dance.

[PAUSE, LIGHT HUMOR]

I know that sounds like engineering talk.

But stick with me—

It’s just a fancy way of saying:

Relationships do MATTER to keep things moving.

Values hold us together.

Traditions guide the way.

[PAUSE]

we don't just keep tradition alive; we pass on

empowerment,

cultural pride,

and lifelong purpose...

[PAUSE]

But to keep moving forward, you need more than inspiration —

you need a system.

[LOOK AROUND – WARM SMILE – OPEN HANDS OUTWARD]

MY experience with this community...

[NOD – SMALL STEP FORWARD – SLIGHT LIFT IN TONE]

I call that system...

That infrastructure...

[HAND OVER HEART – THEN GESTURE FORWARD]

...the STEAM-TEAMS engine.

[SLOW PACE – HAND OPEN PALM UP]

In the Filipino culture, we already have the perfect word...[PAUSE – SAY CLEARLY]

BAYANIHAN.

[LOOK UPWARD – BOTH HANDS MIMIC LIFTING A BEAM]

Back then, bayanihan meant literally lifting houses together with bamboo poles.

Today, we have digital houses which means lifting people together with STEAM skills.”

[SLOWLY COUNT ON FINGERS – EYE CONTACT]

Science...

Technology...

Engineering...

Arts... and

Math.

[ENERGIZING TONE – SMALL FORWARD STEP]

STEAM-TEAMS is bayanihan...

“Where engineers, students, and community members working side-by-side to

LIFT, SHAPE, and MOVE future GENERATIONS forward.”

[PAUSE – OPEN PALM OUT]

Different words... same spirit...

[STEADY VOICE – SMALL NOD]

And here’s why I say:

STEAM × TEAMS = BAYANIHAN.

[UPBEAT TONE – SLIGHT HEAD NOD]

Because that spirit shines here every day—

in the brilliance found in this community through:

[COUNT ON FINGERS – SHORT PAUSES – EYE CONTACT]

- **The science behind cherished Filipino recipes.**
- **The technology of digital online invitations.**
- **The engineering of in-person and TEAMS meetings**

— the kind of planning that keeps events

like Miss Fil-Am running smoothly.”

- **The art of costumes, dances, and songs.**
- **The math behind budgeting scholarships and events.**

[PAUSE – LOOK AROUND ROOM – NOD SLOWLY]

That’s STEAM—

helping prepare future generations become leaders.



[CHANGE TO CONFIDENT TONE – SMALL LIFT IN VOLUME]

And guess what?

The National Federation of Filipino-American Associations...

**reports STEAM programs can boost
student interest in STEM by 30 to 50%.**



[POINT TO AUDIENCE – SMILE]

This community isn't just keeping up—

[SLIGHTLY LOUDER – LIFT HAND UPWARD]

You're leading the way.



[STEP FORWARD – HAND OVER HEART]

And that's why organizations like IEEE...

and communities like yours...

share more in common than you might think.

[WARM TONE – SMALL NOD]

“So maybe... just maybe...

organizations like IEEE

can walk alongside communities like yours —

where bayanihan is already alive.

Together, we can amplify what’s already working...

lifting others,

multiplying the ripple effect,

and carrying the future forward.”

[PAUSE]

And TEAMS?

[GRIN – 1.5 SECONDS]

That simply stands for:

Together Everyone Accomplishes Meaningful STUFF! 😊

[BEAT – LIGHT LAUGH]

At one time or another,

Everyone here has been:

- **Setting up chairs**
- **Fixing up microphones**
- **Designing flyers**
- **Coordinating logistics**
- **Mentoring youth and**
- **Handing out pancit.**

That STUFF seeing everyone pitching in...is leadership.

I say that because

**When I visited the Philippine Military Academy,
near Baguio City, many, many years ago,**

I came across a quote that still resonates with me

AND it goes something like this:

“Not everyone will become a president.

Not everyone will become a general.

But everyone can choose to lead.”

[PAUSE – let words settle, [LOOK UP – 3 SECONDS]

As Coach Wooden said:

“Good values attract good people.”

That’s what you’ve built here —

A community where values come first,

and people follow.

Just look around tonight:

Our pageant contestants,

our young scholars,

our youth dancers...

each showing

discipline,

creativity, and the

bayanihan spirit.

John Wooden also taught:

“Make greatness attainable for all.”

[BEAT]

And that’s exactly what you’re doing —

with every scholarship,

with every pageant,

**and with every plate of lumpia and pancit
handed out with love.**

[PAUSE]

You’re not just preserving culture...

You’re passing greatness forward.

[PAUSE]

As a Life Senior Member of IEEE...

I've spent several decades — yes, I'm that old...

[PAUSE – 2 BEATS]

Mentoring:

- **Engineers**
- **Educators**
- **Entrepreneurs**

Realizing how

[SLOW, MEASURED DELIVERY – COUNT ON FINGERS AGAIN]

- **Engineering — builds tools.**
- **Culture — gives tools meaning.**
- **Leadership — puts it all into action.**

[PAUSE – slight nod – EXPANSIVE GESTURE, LOOK UP – 3 SECONDS – Calm Confidence]

So I leave you with this:

[CALL TO ACTION – STRONG VOICE – Slight forward lean, open stance]

Be more than a guest—

[Open right hand toward audience]

be a guide.

Be more than a participant—

[Bring both hands in, palms together at chest height]

be a pillar.

Be more than a spectator—

[Point gently to audience, sweeping left to right]

be a spark.

[Tone shift – Warm, invitational – Hands lowered, palms open]

That is,

- **Continue to be part of this TEAM.**

[Small hand circle gesture on “TEAM”]

- **Continue to**

Show up, [Two-finger point to audience, then touch own chest]

Speak up [Hand cupped by mouth outward gesture]

And

Step up [Step slightly forward on “step up”]

[LOOK UP – 4 SECONDS – Hold steady gaze]

Because when YOU show up—

[Emphasize YOU with slight point, then open palm]

future generations believe.

When YOU care—they lead. [Right hand over heart]

[Tone – Faith-grounded, slightly slower pace – Soft smile]

In other words,

- **“When you lift others...**

you lift yourself CLOSER to the MAKER upstairs.”

[Hand lift upward]

- **“When you enhance others...**

you HONOR the MAKER upstairs.”

[Small bow of head, hands together briefly]

[Tone – Cultural pride – Energizing lift in voice]

**Friendship and Unity are your
foundation**

**This EXCEPTIONAL community is the STEAM engine, amplifying your
culture’s future with the high-tech skillset**

Your TEAMS mindset are the infrastructure

the hands,

hearts, and

minds

that get things done

for the modern era

what John Wooden calls “Team Spirit”

defined as ‘WE supercedes ME’

which is the same as the Bayanihan Spirit.

As a veteran, I'm proud to say:

Filipino Americans are among the

largest Asian groups in the U.S. military.

Over 250,000 have served.

[BEAT]

Many go on to excel in

technology,

engineering, and

healthcare—

just like the students here today.

[PAUSE]

You are building a pipeline of purpose —

a legacy that serves,

and a future that leads.

[PAUSE – 2 seconds – smile]

In closing and please pardon my American accent,

Maraming salamat po.

[PAUSE – nod, warm tone]

Mabuhay ang Filipino American Community of Southern Colorado.

[PAUSE – confident tone]

Mabuhay tayong lahat.

[PAUSE – smile]

May God’s LIGHT continue to guide this community...

and May His HAND continue to protect this great nation.

[LOOK UP – 3 SECONDS – confident close, slight smile]